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Queen Zenobia



Queen Zenobia

A Play in
Four Acts

by

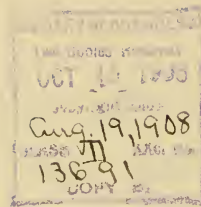
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CAST OF CHARACTERS.

AURELIAN.....*The Emperor of Rome.*
 LUCIUS.....*His First General.*
 LONGINUS.....*Counsellor to Zenobia.*
 MARIO.....*First General of Palmyra.*
 CORNELIUS.....*Second General of Palmyra.*
 WALLBALATH.....*Zenobia's Son.*
 ZENOBIA.....*Queen of Palmyra.*

SALAMMBO)
 MARA)
 DOMITIA)
 GWENYFAR)*Her Waiting Women.*

LEONA)
 HEBE)*Dancing Girls of Aurelian.*

Soldiers of Palmyra and Rome, Officers, Slaves, etc.

ACT I.

Scene 1.

(The chapel of Zenobia's palace at Palmyra. The bodies of Odeanthus and Herod are lying on biers, to the right of the stage, they are heaped with flowers and candles are burning at the head and feet. In a niche in the wall there is a gold statue of Jupiter, with incense burning before it. It is high noon outside and the heavy crimson curtains across the back are drawn, thro' which the sunlight shifts, redly. Far off one can hear the chant of the mourners and nearer, the step of the sentry outside. Two mail-clad soldiers guard the door. Domitia and Gwenyfar are scattering the last flowers on the corpses.)

GWENYFAR.

He seems to sleep. He lies as straight and calm
As if th' unkindly fate had all been planned,
He should be stabbed and fall in his own blood
And meets it with his silent fortitude.

DOMITIA.

There was no cry, no plea; was not a sound
Save the dull thud as his dead body fell.

GWENYFAR.

Aye, like the image on a marble tomb—
Stern, unrelenting, facing death he lies.

DOMITIA.

Nor wept the child, tho' the warm dews of spring
Still kissed his face and life before him lay,
"My Mother! Oh, my Mother!" that was all.

GWENYFAR.

Jove guard the noble lady. None may say
A word of pity. She her sorrow wears
As tho' a jewel and defies them all.

DOMITIA.

Her oldest son and yet she never wept,
When home they brought him, with his father, dead.
But softly bade them lay the bodies down
And tell the people that their king was dead.
She stooped and kissed her husband's quiet brow
And brushed a lock of hair from his pale face,
Said, "Take him to the chapel. You may go."
And thus they went and left her with her child.

GWENYFAR.

Hath she a heart? But, yonder, look, she comes.

(Enter Zenobia)

ZENOBIA.

You need stay here no longer.

DOMITIA.

Cannot I ———

ZENOBIA.

Is naught to do. When tolls the seventh hour
May come once more to look upon your lord.

(Exit Domitia and Gwenyfar)

My master, oh, why hast thou left thy wife?
My son, oh, why couldst thou no longer stay
With her, thy mother, who doth love thee so? —
Thou lay'st a heavy trust upon my head.
I shall fulfill it, I shall have revenge.
Thou hast my child and I thy people have
But thou hast left me so alone, come back
A little, little, while to counsel me.
I'll put them man by man, upon the sword
To pay thy death!— which all the kingdom's wealth,
Yet could not pay — and thou, my little son,
Before thy flower of life had opened up! —
I will be great, but what were greatness worth

Without the giving of it unto thee?
Thou art myself, then I, myself, am dead.
How can I, dead, fulfill the heavy trust
To live up to thy pure nobility?
I do not wish to rule. Head but a head,
Mind but a mind, nor any heart at all.
Slept in my heart, the pride of all the kings;
But when my heart is dead, how can that pride,
Break thro' the granite of the tomb of death?
That thou art dead, and I am forced to drink
The cup Fate holds to my unwilling lips,
To think the sky is blue, the sun can shine,
The very earth and heavens seem to mock
My desolation, thou art gone from me!
And I must deck myself like the green fields,
Laugh like the fountain, and sing like the lark,
When thou canst hear no longer. Canst thou not
Catch one poor word I say to thee? So still!
That thou art dead, thou art so cold, so cold,
And thou, my baby, come but back to me
And smile, once more, and hold —

(Enter Mario)

MARIO.

Your Majesty.

ZENOBIA.

My lord?

MARIO.

The priests would come, the hour hath toll'd,
The people wait outside to bless the king.

ZENOBIA.

They may come in.

(Exit Mario)

Oh, thou desolate dead,
The pride of all the kingdom laid so low,
Where now the gold and pow'r? Oh, Herod mine

A mother ought to die before her child.

(Enter priests, nobles, etc., preceded by ten children, dressed in white, who scatter flowers on the corpses. Zenobia ascends to the chair of state and remains standing while the children and priests chant.)

First Chant.

Receive thou, oh, great Zeus, our mighty dead,
And take him to thy high Olympian fields
And let him feast, forever, with the gods.
Wait thou beyond the flood of the black Styx
Minerva and thy warlike brother, Mars,
Well he deserves the welcome of thy hearts.
Fair Juno, blush, for there is come a man
To feast in thine immortal company,
Who is the greatest hero of the world.
Then let us weep and mourn our heavy loss
But there will be thanksgiving on the Heights
Our noble king dwells with the gods, at last!

Second Chant.

And to you, Venus, goddess of all love,
We give the dearest flower of youth, our prince,
To gentle Cupid, to the queen of night
Thou, bright Diana, with thy hunting spear,
To thee, Apollo, with thy sun-lit song,
Let him hold out the nectar cup to thee,
He is as fair as thine own Ganymede,
All the spring's sunshine lurks within his heart.
Thine be the joy, we have but sorrow left.
Gods, take them both with thee always to live!
(Exit priests, carrying the biers, followed by children, nobles, etc.
Dead march. Mara alone remains with the queen.)

MARA.

Will you not look upon the funeral pyre?

ZENOBIA.

My heart is sick and I can think no more,
Paralysis is on my very soul.
Oh, get you gone! I come. They shall not go
Until my eyes have seen the fire's light.

(Exit Mara)

Is this the way that I shall always be
Thus numb and with this voiceless deep despair?
For I must think and act and be—the queen.
My resolutions must be fire hot,
Forged on the anvil of a fierce revenge,
My brain as brilliant as the polished steel
That lightly makes life leap into death's arms.

(Slowly, step by step, she has come to the back of the stage. Now she pulls aside the crimson curtains and stands in the full glare of the sunlight, looking out.)

Oh, how the torches flutter in the wind,
And how the snared bird struggles to be free!
Aloft, aloft, oh, mighty spirit, borne
By all the deities, free from earth pain!
This is the last that I can give to thee,
A little fire and then pale ashes gray—
Oh, thou that wast—enough, it is alight—
The bird is free—both—gone from me!

(Involuntarily, with the tears running down her face, she stretches out her arms. Then, with a shudder, she pulls herself together and draws the curtains close. Curtain.)

Scene 2.

(Waiting room of the queen's private apartments. Mario and Domitia.)

MARIO.

I pray you beg the queen to make all haste.

DOMITIA.

The queen is at devotions, I have said,
And hath left orders not to be disturbed.

MARIO.

My business is most pressing and it is
Of great importance that I see her, now.

DOMITIA.

When she comes forth, I'll tell her you are here.

MARIO.

There's utmost danger in each wasted word.

DOMITIA.

Then I must pray you speak no more to me.

MARIO.

Must I profane the place of piety
Break my way inward with my naked hands?

DOMITIA.

No, good your lordship, for the door is armed.

MARIO.

Such insolence!—but I must see the queen.

DOMITIA.

Your honor is my noble mistress' friend,
I know she holds you in a high regard,
But she is prostrate with her recent grief,
And sure may speed her husband's soul to heaven,
Without the interference of the court.

(Enter Zenobia)

ZENOBIA.

Fie, my lord! Quarrel with my waiting maid!

MARIO.

Your majesty, I've business of import
That with all haste I must impart to you.
With impudence, my entrance she refused.

ZENOBIA.

I think that her mentality is low.
She hoped to please and hath displeased instead,
By knowing not the smaller from the great.
Forgive, fidelity is her one wrong.
If she's no brains then she was born without,
So we should blame her mother and not her.
But, peace, we wrangle over little things.
Domitia, go.

(Exit Domitia)

Your message now, my lord.

MARIO.

My queen, I am the bearer of ill news.

ZENOBIA.

Then speak it quick that we have naught to fear.

MARIO.

Your majesty, I think we've found the man
Who gave the order for your husband's death.

ZENOBIA.

And you call this ill news! All haste, proceed!

MARIO.

I have but late received from the frontier,
The news Aurelian marches on us now
With some twelve thousand men and cavalry,
Their generals and the implements of war.
This did he when he heard your husband's death
Had been performed by an assassin's hand
And that the heir apparent was cut off
By his untimely killing, so the land
Had no one but a little child to rule,
Who could not lead his soldiers to the front
Nor battle with the army of the world.
Moreover, 't was not done upon a thought

But while your noble husband still did live
He had the army ready for the raid
But held aloof and waited for some word
Which hath been sent him and now with all speed
He comes, with hope of capturing our court.

ZENOBIA.

Oh, truly he must have a noble mind
To come and war upon a little child!
But, my lord, we are not all children here
And my young son has not begun to rule
Therefore, I take the reins of government,
Into my hands and all the world shall see
A war well-waged by woman, on my word!

MARIO.

Your majesty, we will all do our best
To help in your remarkable design.

ZENOBIA.

Your hand, my lord! And now I pray you go
And have 't proclaimed thro' all the kingdom's width,
How our dear country's honor was disdained.
Shout to the gods the murder of the king,
Tell of the brutal killing of the prince,
'Till all the people's hearts shall drop red blood
But the red blood of anger, good my lord!
To Syria and Persia do proclaim
Aurelian's outrage and give call for arms.
Remind the Arabs of the heavy debts
Of kindness, that they owe our royalty
And every Roman, who 'll keep with us
Laud as hero to the very skies.
Tell all Palmyra I, myself, shall lead
Their troops to battle, with them, fall or die.
Oh, leave no stone unturned that can help make
This spark of loyalty a living fire!

MARIO.

All will I do, liege lady, and shall be
Your majesty's supporter to the death.

ZENOBIA.

Go! Tell our husband's cousin he shall be
Our second general as thou art the first;
Let every dirge that wails Palmyra thro'
Turn on the instant to a battle-cry
And bid thou every mourner mourn no more
But thrust a naked sword into his hand
In all the land the one word be "Revenge!"

(Exit Mario. Curtain)

ACT II.

Scene 1.

(Zenobia's apartments, early morning. Enter Zenobia.)

ZENOBIA.

The earth doth sleep, but our good friend, the Sun,
Hath set the bright red signal of revenge
Aloft on every snowy mountain peak.

(Calls)

Mara! The lazy child, perchance she sleeps
While all the world is listening for my voice.

(Enter Mara, yawning)

MARA.

Entreat your pardon, madame, I did sleep.

ZENOBIA.

Then you know not that this day starts a war
That shall go down thro' history, to all time?

MARA.

Your majesty, I tried to keep awake,
To think of naught but bloody battle-fields,
The cries of war and clash of armed men,
All faded grey, my tired head fell back,
Against the wall — then I heard madame call.

ZENOBIA.

This morn it seems that we do all sleep late.
If Mario awaits my presence not
I prithee wake and bring him, in all haste.

(Exit Mara)

And this bright morn we meet Aurelian's host.
Oft have I thought to meet the Roman king,
When peace and plenty smiled upon the land
And show him the proud city of my heart.
Oh, my Palmyra, from thy highest tower

He could have looked into thy busy streets
And seen thy beauty, garden of the world!
As king unto a king he would have come,
Unto a land that was as rich as his
And needs must say, "Zenobia rules well."
This might have been; but he hath killed the wish
Hath drowned it in the red blood of my lord,
Could I but kill him with his hands still warm
Still dripping red with this untimely death,
What mattered all the anguish of the world?
Then could Palmyra's fairest gardens rise,
In blinding flame and smoke into the skies
My regal life be quickly brought to death
By any base serf's hand, the axe's blow,
My body thrown with the traitor's, who
Had forfeited the pleasure of the crown
Yet would I feel that I had known success.
Forget I am a woman, gods, and make
This the most holy aim of all my life.
Oh, let not pleading mercy change my course
To pity him, who did not pity me.

(Enter Mario)

MARIO.

I do await your pleasure, dear my queen.

ZENOBIA.

Haste, noble warrior, we tarry long.
To think the sun should rouse us to a war
That means all joy or sorrow to our land!
We march with all the army to the front
But leave around the town a barricade,
And those sufficient soldiers that in case,
In evil case, the fox with whom we play
Hid by night's darkness should escape our guard
Or that defeat sits heavy, on our men,

And he, in triumph, doth approach our town,
Thinking to gain by plunder, sinful spoils;
He'll find the soldiers ready to defend
And that Palmyrians know the arts of forts.
But think you not while I precautions take,
I dream an instant of our own defeat.
Oh, I am so secure of victory,
We'll o'ercome them by very force of will
And wreak a heartless vengeance for our lord.
Begone, and give the orders I have said.
The details worry me, nor can I more
Withhold this bloody, splendid dream of war.

(Exit Mario. Enter Salammbo)

ZENOBIA.

Salammbo, mine, dost know 'tis time to march?
I feel as tho' I did approach a fete,
Fain would I fling away my mourning garb
And clothe me in my coronation robe.
All death, dost hear me say, I have forgot.
A creature of the very air am I,
No feeble mortal passion do I know,
No earthly music but the battle-cry,
The field of signal victory and of death,
Alone do I inhabit. I am now
On tip-toe for the mighty clash of arms,
The smell of smoke and dripping of life blood.
Oh, let me sing the mad joy of the fight,
Give me the poetry of the golden god,
To laud this wondrous pastime to the skies!
The link that holds me to this earth is slight.
Canst thou not feel my immortality,
My very kinship to the radiant gods?
Oh, when this war is over I shall go
To see again the hero of my soul,
Gold-crowned with victory, on wings of light,

Shall I ascend, thro' blood-stained clouds to peace!
Build me a pyre, unto the very skies
That sooner may I come to him who waits!
—What, do I weep? My silver dream all gone?
This proves I am a woman after all
And only that—not linked to the sky
Save what I love the very best is there.—

— — — — —

How looks the army waiting my command?

SALAMMBO.

Your majesty, 'tis but a sea of gold
Of flashing arms and faces all alight,
For thee and for the golden boon of death.
On every soldier's brow there is a wreath
That tells that he has victory at love,
E'en tho' he wears his laurel to defeat.
At all the open windows women stand
And in the tiny gardens set on high,
With tear-wet faces, in their gayest garb.
They laugh and weep and kiss their hands and toss
The message down to those from whom they part
And now and then do faintly raise a cheer
Full leaden with the sadness of their hearts
And that the men below three-fold reply
For they are going to the battle-fields
And in the rush of action can lose thought
(And then I think they never care so much)
It is the helpless women stand and wait—
And smile, most pitiful of all, they smile!
Forgive me, lady, I can see no more;
My heart doth overflow into mine eyes.
I hear the children gaily shout goodbye
And laugh and sing—they think it is a fete.
A long farewell! Ye gods, they do not know.

(Weeps)

ZENOBIA.

This shows you my responsibility.
These men, to those they love must I return.
Yet I am the high priestess of the land
And on its mighty altar I must lay
The sacrifice of all those broken hearts
And all the men that in this war must die.
My hand must be as heavy as a sword,
My justice as unsparing as the gods',
As I divide the women from the men
And lead them to the battle-ground of Fate.
And shall I shrink? The immortality
Of him who hath gone past shall crown me still
I know he waits, therefore, I cry, "All Haste!"

(Enter Mario)

MARIO.

Your majesty, it is the time to march.

ZENOBIA.

All hail to thee! The bright hour is at hand.
The sacrifices are already made?
The figure, red, of war holds out its arms
And welcomes us to its blood-stained embrace.
Farewell — Farewell! To death or victory!

(Exit Zenobia and Mario. Curtain)

Scene 2.

(The queen's apartments, two weeks later. Enter Zenobia, Mario, Cornelius, Longinus, etc.)

ZENOBIA.

So we went forth and thus do we return,—
As hares beset by bloodhounds in full cry
Flee to the burrow that will soon be heaped
In helpless desolation on their heads.

CORNELIUS.

My lady, take it not so much to heart.
I do await the mercy of the king
Who I think will be kindly in our need.

ZENOBIA.

Sir, do you speak of our most royal sire,
My son, who has not yet begun to rule,
Or he, that thus besieges hard our gates,
The emperor of Rome, with whom we war?
I know not what you mean by that word "king."
My son has mercy for all subjects, who
Are faithful unto us unto the death.

CORNELIUS.

My queen, you cling to no imprudent hope
Nor dream of victory in this sorry war!

ZENOBIA.

"This sorry war?" Forsooth! And wherefore sad?
Sits the defeat so heavy on our men
That never more do they expect to fight?
Or do the sluggards sleep beside their fires,
Warmed with the thought of mercy from *kind* Rome?
Or do they howl again upon their pay?
Oh, speak you not to me of cursed gold!—
They have no hearts, 'tis but a lump of gold
Within their breasts that constant cries for more,
To raise a pleasant jingle 'gainst itself!
Talk not of gold, for what do I not know?
The first defeat that met our men was light,
As 't was, we lost but Romans at the worst.
Then rose this fiendish howling of the dogs,
For pay! Their pay! They not fight lacking gold.
Palmyra's beggared with the heavy debts,
Of old that Rome has forced against the crown,
My last coin lay upon my battle-horse,

Where gold, I say, unless the very skies
Opened and showered money from above?

LONGINUS.

Dear lady, let me speak. I have a plan
That long hath hung half-finished in my brain.
For all the Persians waver to and fro
As the slow scales of battle rise and fall,
Now ready to obey the Roman king,
Now, fearful of thine arrow's bitter flight,
And thinking on the things of long ago.
Upon this sleepy, hesitating folk
Doth all the victory of this war depend.
They must be roused to hatred; they must fight;
They needs must take the places of the men
That traitors to us turned and went to Rome.
Where they lie, half-asleep, in the bright sun
That lights their land, with heated, level beams,
The heralds crying "Arms! To Arms!" must go.
Awake them with the bugle's warning cry;
In place of cymbal, give them drum and fife.
Arouse their hearts, with all the noise of war
Yet, let them fear Palmyra, that they may,
Bow underneath the burden of her yoke.

ZENOBIA.

A well-thought plan, my lord, but much too late.
We are besieged, you know, on every side.
What heralds can escape this wretched town?
What man can walk, unscathed, thro' Rome's wide camp?
It is too late, my lord, it cannot be.

LONGINUS.

It is the only hope that now remains
And therefore we must find a way to it.

ZENOBIA.

Alas, my lord, how can it ever be?

Did these men hold such honor in their hearts,
That they would do this thing for their poor land,
Walk thus into the very arms of death,
Did they pass thro' the camp and in the night,
On Arab steeds, across the desert fly
To far-off Persia, think, when they were there
Could they arouse those people, to a war,
Waged here, with Rome or bring them here, to me,
Without a leader to command the march,
Without a man, the people could esteem,
Would fight or die to 'fill his slightest word?
That is a hero, sir, and, lacking that,
No force of arms nor call can bring them here.

LONGINUS.

Then must a hero go that way, my queen.

ZENOBIA.

That I should stop to ponder, falter still,
And yet the step is very grave, my lord,
As we can gain, so can we lose it all.
My people! Oh, my people! Good, my lord
The women and the little children wait
Inside the walls, I must decide for them.
(That Pity should now lay its icy hand,
Upon my heart that was so strong so long!
I cannot leave my people thus alone,
For they know not decision of their own
And will not fight,—and yet if I do stay
It but condemns them to a certain death,
Swiftly or singly, be it sword or thirst.)
It is decided I, my lords, will go.

CORNELIUS.

Your majesty, not you!

MARIO.

My queen, not you!

ZENOBIA.

Aye, me. And prithee, wherefore should I stay,
To shun the danger where I send my men,
To stay behind in fear for my good self,
To lack the very courage of a queen,
To hold my tongue when it were best I speak,
As speak I must, my lords, with words of fire,
To send a man to bring my soldiers here,
As one would parley with an angry child,
To lie and wait the messenger of ill,
If ill it is that comes upon us now,
To try to hide a frightened face from Fate,
I prithee, tell me wherefore should I stay?

CORNELIUS.

Dear lady, thou art monarch of us all,
It ill beseems a sovereign should go
Forth as a herald with a battle-cry.

ZENOBIA.

It ill beseems a sovereign should be
Besieged as I am now on every side!
It is decided, lords, this thing must be.—
And I will go but let me ask you now,
Before I leave you for what may be long
May I not take my little son with me?
He will be quiet in the Roman camp,
He will not make the peril worse to me
Nor chances of detection, any more,
And, oh, I cannot, cannot leave him here!
Forgive—my grief sits newly on my heart.
Let him and me go forth, give your farewell,
Good wishes and the watch-word of the town.

MARIO.

We can do nothing, have it as thou wilt.

ZENOBIA.

If I am captured and return no more,
Again Aurelian will besiege the town.
I beg you to defend it 'till it is
A hopeless failure and I beg ye see
The women and the children have no harm.
So do not let it come to flames. Protect
The south walls most for they are very weak
And be well ware of tinder. All the men
That are sore wounded thou mayst bring in here.
As the supply of water is so small
Lay sparingly upon the fevered lips
The blessed drink — and should the heavens rain,
Save every muddy drop, set wide-mouthed jars
Upon the thirsty streets. — That it might rain!
I lay my hands upon your hands, my lords.
We are far come upon a bloody way,
And ye have been my friends and servitors.
My blessing to ye and my grace — Adieu.
(Slowly, she lets her hands fall, and turns and goes out. Curtain)

ACT III.

Scene 1.

(The tent of Aurelian. On one side of the stage, the king is on a raised dias, beside which two pretty girls, dressed as flower maidens, stand. There is a long banqueting table on the other side, around which several officers are carousing noisily. There is much booty of gold and silver lying about and two fantastically dressed negro slaves guard the entrance of the tent. It is about midnight and as the curtain rises, one hears the far-off cry of the sentry. Aurelian turns to one of the girls and demands in a voice of thunder —)

AURELIAN.

Well, wilt thou sing or wilt thou gape all night?

LEONA.

(With an involuntary shudder of disgust)

Song.

Long am I held here, oh, my beloved
Kept far from thee
Yet do I always hear thy voice calling,
On land and sea.
And when I waken, tears on my lashes,
From my dear dreams
Still do I live in a land, long forsaken,
Where —

AURELIAN.

A curse upon thy mournful, whining song!
A curse upon thy dreary, mournful face!
Take her away!

(Turning to the other girl)

Canst sing or dost thou weep?

HEBE.

(Pulling herself together and beating time lightly on her tambourine.)

Song.

See the red rose growing there.
Wilt thou wear it in thy hair,
Wilt thou wear it in thy hair,
Oh, my lady fair?

See the blossom growing there,
'Tis my heart, oh lady fair,
Wilt thou wear it any where,
Oh, my lady fair?

There are other blossoms rare,
See them, growing every where
Violets and maiden-hair,
Oh, my lady fair.

Many maidens every where,
Ladies slim, so if you dare
Me to scorn, well, will I care
Oh, my lady fair?

Were there but one lady fair
In this world of grief and care
Were there but one rose to wear,
I would mourn, maid fair.

A GENERAL.

A truce unto the fickleness of men,
I swear I'd cleave unto a loyal maid,
Without a glance for beauties at my side,
'Till I was summoned out across the Styx.

SEVERAL MEN.

Hear, hear our love-sick general talk of faith!

AURELIAN.

Do not proclaim your folly, man alive!
Let love spread out upon all womankind
Save those with ugly faces —

*(Noise outside. Enter Zenobia, heavily veiled in black
and guarded by two soldiers.)*

AURELIAN.

Who comes here?

GUARD.

A prisoner captured coming thro' the camp.

AURELIAN.

A woman, well unveil her.

(Zenobia steps forward and throws back her veil.)

ALL.

What! The queen!

ZENOBIAS.

Even the queen! Left and betrayed by all,
Besieged by foes, betrayed for paltry gold,
Her soldiers traitors turned to their own cause,
Her life no value and her dearest hopes
Thrust on the points of twice a thousand spears.
Oh, this is pretty warfare that you wage!
First, murder you all leaders of a land,
Then force starvation onto it, buy spies,
Until you climb on the defenseless walls,
Of an unpeopled town. Yea, I the queen
Gone forth into the night to look for friends,
Knowing where I did go, thro' your vile camp,
Hoping that all your lust for wine and song,
Would dull your ears. It did. 'Tis not thro' you
I am here taken captive, mine own men,
Poor heart-sick starving creatures, that they are
Think they have sold their queen to buy them bread.
Yet give me not your pity, Roman king,
For rather would I stand as I do now,
All helpless with my little, helpless child,
And look upon a certain, lowly death,
Than sit like you your mistress at your side,
With song and flowers and all the charms of gold
An hundred murders, heavy on your soul.
Aye, heavy, tho' you do not know it now

And think you drown it in the pleasant drink.
We all have souls and tho' yours is as base
As any blood-mad beast that knows no law,
There is a day long after you are dead,
When all that doth remain of little you
Leaving the hulk that it once called a man
Must go alone, unguarded, in the night.
And the black river that doth silent flow,
This soul must cross and from its waters dark
Will rise and stretch the hundred bloody hands
Of those you killed still damp and warm with life
Around your neck, across your eyes, upon
Your parted lips that try to gasp a prayer,
Long since forgot, and they will draw and draw
You, slowly, down and down, into the dark,
Into a crimson sea, of clotting blood
And high above the rushing you shall hear
The curse of those long dead—

AURELIAN.

Silence, I say!

ZENOBIA.

You cannot silence me, I've naught to lose
And since the murder of my kinsfolk, I
Have prayed that I might look upon your face.
I thought, perchance, that captured by my men,
Close bound and conquered I could see you come
And with my lips, pronounce your certain death,
Ringing the knell into your fear-dimmed ears,
'Till you could feel your chill blood turn to ice,
And flow no more within your stiffened veins.
I thought if I could see you lying dead
Streaked with your blood, among your frightened men
That I could kneel beside you and could scream
My deadly curse, into your drowned sense,
Until the very mantle of the sky

Was split atwain and all the radiant gods,
Would hear the horror of my words with fear.
So long upon my overburdened heart
Hath lain the prophecy of this, my hate,
That now, beneath the pity of the gods,
Do I raise my right hand and thus declare,—
Thro' ages may your body rot away,
A ghastly, helpless thing, without a tomb.
Forever may you be in Hades, damned.
For the uncounted list of all your crimes,
May you forever suffer all the pain,
That did afflict the people, who did love
The victims of the foulness of your brain.
For all the joy that you have ever known,
Thrice heavy be the portion of your grief.
For every drop of wine that thou hast drunk,
May you drink deadly poison by and by,
And every one that loved you, may they turn
All that mistaken passion into hate.
Oh, may there be a day when thou shalt be
All lost for friends or succor in distress
And every way you'll turn you shall but find
Curses and tight shut doors and closed hearts —

AURELIAN.

Were it not for the beauty of your face
And form, which both are more than passing fair,
I'd signal to my men and they would lay
Their swarthy hands upon those angry lips
And bind those wrathful hands. But I say, nay.
Too fair a mouth for that was made to kiss
Too tender hands that should, in truth, obey
A gentler mandate than a scornful frown.
Your eyes are stars, my lady, in your scorn
I prithee let the heavens shine on me
Despite the bitter whiplash of your tongue.

ZENOBIA.

Far rather would I have your curses, king,
Than thus to be debased by your free praise.
I would remind you, sir, I am a queen.
A serving maid or mistress may be fair
And pleased their beauty should attract you so
Did they not know the curse of all your praise.
These things, hands, lips are given by the gods,
A treasure casket or a charnel vault
To hold a soul a very little while.
Since I am daughter of a line of kings,
Mine shall be pure, or broken by myself.

AURELIAN.

Philosophy sits lightly on your lips
The rights and wrongs of women and of men,
Yet do not ponder thus nor thus deny
The lust of passion that is in us all.

ZENOBIA.

My lord, I do not know whereof you speak.

AURELIAN.

Ah, well, my pretty lady, be it so.
I fancy that this little war is o'er,
I do not doubt surrender of the town,
And then, with speed, we shall proceed to Rome
And enter there with a triumphal march
And all artistic treasures of the town
Brought thro' the streets and our good soldiers all
With bright new armor, in their best array
And after me shall come our fairest prize
Bound to a chariot of shining gold;
The lovely woman that was once a queen —
Come let us on and we'll besiege the town
You may now go,— my pretty queen — goodnight.

(Curtain)

ACT IV.

Scene 1.

(The place is the terrace of Zenobia's villa, near Rome, some twelve years later. To the left, looking to the far-off sea and mountains there is a marble bench and to the right, half hidden by cypress trees, the tall, white pillars of one of the villa's many verandas. Enter Mara and Salammbo, talking.)

SALAMMBO.

Oh, but the years lie heavy on her head,
On her white hair, the sorrow of her face,
She seems so old, so very old, and yet —

MARA.

Oh, pity of the grandeur of her soul,
The firmness of her life that would not break,
That these few years have made her grow so old,
So sternly, all the mercy in her heart
Is frozen underneath this deadly calm,—
She lives so in the little things of life
Can such a grand soul deaden into this?

SALAMMBO.

It is not dead, she has a gaping wound
Of her dear dead that bleeds within her breast
And she doth cover it with little things,
Have pity on her, she can suffer more,
Yet more, can trouble tear that noble heart
It throbs as fast and with as anxious pain
As when we watched the battle long ago.
She is like an immortal, ever doomed,
To bear all earthly sorrows —

(Enter Zenobia)

My good maid, —

Salammbo, ah, my eyes are bad, today.
I must not fail to recognize a friend.

Canst thou not tell me where my son has gone?

SALAMMBO.

The king doth treat him kindly and he hath
Gone to the palace on some great affair.

ZENOBIA.

Gone to the palace? Oh, I would not so.
I do not want the favor of the king —
Not for my boy, for he will never know
What he and I have given unto Rome.

MARA.

Dear lady, if he does not understand
His youth doth sit so warm upon his heart,
That he is pleased that he doth please the king,
As if he pleased a lady or her maid,
Or only a sweet bird upon a bough
Or any small thing in this spring-time world.
Beside you would not consecrate his life,
His glowing, growing life, unto the dead?

ZENOBIA.

His life is consecrate unto the dead.
He must not marry, he must have no heir,
He must run out the gamut of his life
Without a purpose, only that to die.

MARA.

My lady, and he is your youngest son,
And all that life and joy you offer up —

ZENOBIA.

It is long done, decided, long ago
When an ill fate fell on our royal house.
With never hope of succor from distress
It was well known that all our folk should die,
When, the gods let them, issueless and lone.

MARA.

But —

ZENOBIA.

Sometime, in the years that are to be,
Our tombs will stand revealed by foreign hands
And the stone graven tablets of our rule,
From our first noble leader unto me
Who failed and lost it all and yet upheld
The honor of my husband to the death.

SALAMMBO.

And yonder cometh the young prince, my queen.

(Enter Wallbalath)

WALLBALATH.

Oh, dearest lady mother, give you joy.
See how the roses blossom on your cheeks.
Say you are well, dear mother mine, today.

ZENOBIA.

Well and impatient, for my rough, young son.

WALLBALATH.

Send them away for I have much to tell.

(Exit Mara and Salammbo)

I bring to thee an honor on this day!
I went to the king's palace and he said
That he had looked with favor on me late,
That he would make a governor of me!
Of me! Of me! But listen, mother, where,
Over your own Palmyra, I shall rule
And you and I shall there, together, go,
And shall take the taxes due to Rome,
And settle all the quarrels — oh, but thou! —

ZENOBIA.

Oh, ye great gods, this is too much, too much!
What have I done that I offend Thee so
That Thou shouldst even lead me unto this?

WALLBALATH.

What, madame, and you will not like it well?

ZENOBIA.

You know, you know, your father was the king
That ruled that land and you,— you would not go?

WALLBALATH.

Not go! My lady, we can ne'er regain
Our father's country any way but this.
You do not think to rule. 'Tis but a dream,
Impossible, fantastic: in the night,
After much wine perchance, a thing to be.
But nowhere else. It grieves me, madame, that
I bring my first-won honor unto you
And that you let it lie beneath your feet
For memories of things dead long ago.

ZENOBIA.

My son, they should have laid upon thy head,
The royal crown that thy ancestors wore.
Thou shouldst have ruled thy people as their king,
For centuries thy fathers ruled them so.
Thou art bereft of all thy heritage,
Better a slave behind the conquer'r's car
Than to have unwon honors heaped on thee.
For would'st thou be indebted to the king
For life, with never any hope, to pay,
A hireling to him who killed thy kin?
Would'st thou receive the land thy fathers ruled,
Returned to thee thro' hated foreign hands
And live upon the pity of the king?
And thou, a king! And that last golden shred
Of knighthood thou would'st, idly, toss aside
To live in comfort like the very dog
Outside your door that you in pity give
Scraps from your board when you have plenty left,—
To starve your pride that you may live in wealth
Beg and submit for paltry lands and gold —

For even a defeat may glorious be
But base surrender for the fear of blood —
Why every cur that howleth in the streets,
Needs must cry shame, for this outrageous thing!
Oh, I am old, but rather would I die,
Starved, without water, on the barren sands
Of the wide East that stretch from sea to sea,
Where every greedy fowl bird of the air,
Could pick my bones, my body rot away
Without a grave, than live as now I do
And die in peace and have a golden tomb
Star-sprinkled with a thousand myriad stones,
Of value infinite from the far East
In pity lifted by my victor's hands!
So do thou be the same and not forget
The glory of thy great name and thy pride.
There is no treason in true servitude,
But to turn traitor to the very blood,
That beats within your heart, to sell your name
Unto a court that heard that name with awe
As carried by thy noble sire, the king!
Why, e'en the crown, that plaything of a king
Lies fathoms deep, still faithful to its lord.
He, that now rules would sell his very soul
To wear the pretty thing upon his head —
So light yet heavy with significance,
Of unstained honor thro' the bloody years
That count themselves upon the throne's gold.
I am your mother, pity me that I
Beg of my son what should be freely giv'n.
Do not! Do not! Nay, I, the queen, command
Son of thy father, do not do this thing!

WALLBALATH.

You speak, my lady, of a bygone time
And bygone things, which often is the way,

Of older folk, for memory can stir
A long-forgotten splendor into life
That cannot be again, as violent youth,
Doth feed upon the most fantastic dreams
And live in castles that can never be.

ZENOBIA.

My little son, I do not mean it so,
Tho' memory holds much of joy for me.
The world is governed by unspoken laws,
Silent commands that we feel at our births
Or circumstances we cannot control
Of untold duties and unmentioned debts.
We must accept all things such as they are,
The world is as it is and so shall be,
Until it please the gods to have it changed.
Tho' thou in scorn rebel against the chains
That hold thy soul from glory, will the stars
Not shine the same and will the silver moon
Not trail her evening robes across the sky?
The buds on all the boughs will, joyous, break,
The sunshine be as bright, the south wind sigh,
As it did always in thy happy days.
Thou wilt have pity naught from earth or sky,
If thou dost what is wrong: and what is right
Will draw no pleasant interest unto thee.
Yet thou must do the hard and noble thing,
Because it cometh from the silent law,
Of things that are to be. Thou, my poor son
Must pay the heavy debt of fallen kings —

WALLBALATH.

My mother, I have passed beyond the bond
That held my childish spirit unto thee.
The years have come and gone, I am a man,
Am fit for man's estate and fit to judge.

I should not come beneath a woman's rule,
For things a female mind can never grasp,
I, in man's wisdom, well can understand.
And, too, my lady, years have made thee weak
With a long contemplation of thy life.
I do not ask thy will, for I shall do
The thing that I think most beseemeth me.

ZENOBIA.

Silence, conceited child! Ye little know
Wherefore you speak or you would hold your tongue.
To prattle thus that women foolish be
Compared with all the wondrous wit of men!
Couldst thou have done that which I could not do,
Wert thou as old as now? Oh, couldst thou have
Fought single-handed 'gainst the Roman host,
Or paid the angry soldiers without gold,
Or honored more the memory of the king
Or loved thy helpless, suff'ring people more?
Couldst have done all with nothing? Would thy mind
Man's tho' it was have brought thee any gold?
Could there have been another plan than mine,
Without a loss of honor that which thou
With all thy wisdom dost not understand? —
That thou shouldst be naught but a prating fool
Thus raised in blood and glory, with thy bed
Beside a martyred king's! — Oh, weak am I
In but one thing, that I have loved too well!
But had I known that thou shouldst come to this
Shouldst scorn thy mother as a fallen queen
To kneel before a hated king, I would,
I think when thou wast very young and small
Have choked the starting of a useless life,
And let thy little blameless body lie
In honor, in the tomb of other kings.
Now should I curse thee and should turn away,

Should tear thy hated image from my heart,
The memories of thy small childish hands,
And all the days I held at my breast,
Abhor as one doth fear a blasted thing,
The dreaded nearness of an awful sin!—
But thou art all that there is left to me,
So one more question will I give to thee,
Wilt thou go forth or wilt thou stay with me?

WALLBALATH.

I gave the king my answer, long ago.
I did not dream that thou shouldst order me,
Since thou art but a woman, I am a man.
So, tho' you speak so rashly and your face,
Flames into heated anger, at my words,
Or that thou art my mother, chance of birth,
I offer no obedience to thee.
A queen who's fallen is no more a queen.
Thy judgment should be mine, thy fitting place,
As a meek-minded woman, at my feet.
(Slowly, Zenobia turns, looking past her son to the ocean. Her face is grave, impassive, but with a flickering light of prophecy in her eyes. Her voice is calm and sad beyond all words.)

ZENOBIA.

Thy work shall be accursed, and thou shalt be
A curse unto thy people, they to thee.
There shall be blood, destruction, all thy rule
Shall bring but hot rebellion to thy land.
Thou hast no more a mother, go thy way,
Unloved, unwished, uncared-for, quite alone. *(Exit Zenobia)*

WALLBALATH.

(To a servant who enters)

Pack my belongings.

(Curtain)

Scene 2.

(Room in Zenobia's villa. Several heavy chairs and a couch. To the right, there is a casement window looking toward the sea. Enter Aurelian and his train.)

AURELIAN.

(To a servant)

Bid her come forth, we'll speak to her at once.

(Exit servant)

This castle doth give pleasure to mine eye.
We give right royal prisons, eh, my lord?
How long she hath been here! Why, when she came
She seemed the flesh and blood of Beauty's self.
A regal tyrant, sir, her starlit eyes
Shot shafts of fire, thro' me and ye know
I had a hundred beauties at my side.
I never saw a woman nobler formed,
Nor more contemptuous of her loveliness,
Which is a fascination in itself.
She gave me pride for pride — but here she comes.
Is she alive or doth this thing mark
The dwelling of a spirit gone before?

(Enter Zenobia)

Our welcome, noble lady.

ZENOBIA.

And to you.

AURELIAN.

We heard thou wast unhappy and we came
Expecting sore privations and we find
A royal park and castle, servants, too,
And yet a death-pale lady, over proud,
And trying to disdain the might of kings.

ZENOBIA.

I do protest that I made no complaint.

AURELIAN.

It was your waiting women and they said,
"She doth but slowly die, oh, come and save."

ZENOBIA.

I do prefer to die in solitude
And have my death as silent as my life.

AURELIAN.

Thou speakest as of a prophesied event!

ZENOBIA.

I do not mean it so.

AURELIAN.

Zenobia,

Of all the many prisoners I have had,
Were none it seems unhappy as thou art,
Except a wild, young fawn I could not tame
And so had put to death. I see not why
Thou canst not bend thy stubborn knee to me.
Thy bondage is not new, thou art not young,
Thy son's thy way deserted and gone mine,
Thy fetters have been golden and long use
Should make them rather pleasant, thou dost see
On every side, my splendor and my might,
Yet, still dost suffer torture in thy soul
Upholding a lost cause. How foolish this —

ZENOBIA.

Leave exhortations to the priests, my lord.
For it doth ill befit thee thus to play
The paragon of virtues and to sing
Thine own loud praises thro' another's woe.
The reasons thou hast given unto me,
My long imprisonment and mine old age,
How my son sold his honor — dost thou think
That thou canst break me with thy awful might,

Oppress me with my sorrows? Thou hast been
A very generous ruler with thy goods
That thou might'st be more cruel with thy mind.—
Why did you call me here? May I not go?

AURELIAN.

I bring thee evil tidings, yet they show
How rebels, spies and traitors always die.
The governor's has been a rule of blood,
Thy son, I mean, who rules our exiled land.
It seems the people are a sullen lot,
Both free with will and tongue, a baneful thing
For folk enslaved to another land.
He worked them well, increased the tax, they say
And lived in splendor representing Rome,
'Till the hot-headed people, one sad day,
Rebelled and rose against him, foolishly.
He went without the walls and called his men;
He set the town afire, when 'twas found,
It was a battle to the death, then he
Had those rash men who met not death by flame
Sent 'cross the Styx by sword, the women, too,
Since they but breed a faithless, fighting race,
And children lest they should be like their sires.
The flame, they say lit far the evening sky,
A wealth of light and color. In the east,
There hung a little moon to watch the glow,
All night, and in the morning there but lay
Half living embers of a ruined town.
The buildings were so fair there, I can see
The brave old palace and it grieveth me
That all that beauty charred and black should lie,
Yet so, my lady, may all traitors die.

ZENOBIAS.

Was no one saved, no one at all?

AURELIAN.

Thy son.

ZENOBIA.

I mean those faithful to us, do not mock.
My people, oh, my people! Oh, my land!
Beneath much sword and fire hast thou died.

AURELIAN.

Thou seest how evil 'tis to disobey.

ZENOBIA.

The gods did give thee glory, thou shalt have
Sorrow hereafter to o'erreach it all.

AURELIAN.

Spirit that's charming, with a pretty face,
From aged lips deserves no monarch's grace.
(Exit Aurelian and train)

ZENOBIA.

I — I feel dizzy, Mara, help me there.
*(Slowly, she lies down on the couch, rubbing her face
against the pillows like a child.)*

There was a very little prayer, I said,
When I was very small, to the kind Gods,
Who bless all happy children — how I wish
I could remember, just once more, the words,
They seemed so very hopeful. — Oh, my land!
How could they burn my pretty, pretty town
And all the happy people? — oh, but I
Must hurry, I have little time to die!
Tell them I starved, in plenty, without fear
And died as did befit my royal birth.
I wish that thou couldst sing me into rest
As my dear mother did, so long ago.
We had a sunny garden to the south,
And there, when I was tired, I could lie

Among the flowers and the butterflies.
And she would come and lift me in her arms
And carry me right homeward. She is dead
Oh, years and years and yet I miss her still
And all the childish things that used to be.
If I could only see her dear, strong hands
Out of the darkness that is coming now —
My love, my love, thou hast been lost so long!
How soon will I regain thee? — and my son,
My son, that is still mine, I am betrayed
By all that I loved dearest in this life.
Open the window, Mara.— Oh, the sea! —
There is a little breeze from far away,
It clings around the casement, waiting me.
Thou who art mine, I give thee a farewell,
My blessing and my gratitude and love —
I have thought of the prayer,—it runneth so,

Kind Gods, of little children,

Let me rest

And wake me when thy wisdom,

Knoweth best

Enfold me in thine arms—

*(Suddenly, she starts up, opening wide her arms and
crying, loud in ecstasy)*

My husband! Oh my son!

*(She falls back, dead. Outside there is the sound of
many feet and the door is flung roughly open, Wall-
balath and his victorious warriors enter.)*

WALLBALATH.

I wish to see thy lady.

MARA.

She is dead.

(Curtain)

THE END.

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